

## Text 1 -

Barbadian soldiers fired a 21-gun salute as the country's national anthem played during a crowded ceremony at Heroes Square in the capital of Bridgetown. Sandra Mason, who previously served as Barbados' royally appointed governor-general, was sworn in as the republic's new president.

"Vessel Republic Barbados has set sail on her maiden voyage," said Mason following the ceremony, per [BBC News](#). "May she weather all storms and land our country and citizens safely on the horizons and shores which are ahead of us." The country's leaders first revealed their plan to become a republic in September 2020.

"The time has come to fully leave our colonial past behind," wrote Prime Minister [Mia Amor Mottley](#) in a speech prepared for Mason. "Barbadians want a Barbadian head of state."

Barbados' Parliament chose Mason to take on the newly created role of president last month. Mottley presided over Tuesday's watershed ceremony, which counted many famous Barbadians—including international pop star [Rihanna](#)—among its attendees. Mottley honored the singer as a "national hero," citing her "extraordinary commitment to the land of her birth," reports Livia Albeck-Ripka for the [New York Times](#).

Though its leaders no longer swear loyalty to the crown, Barbados remains part of the [Commonwealth of Nations](#), a voluntary organization of 54 former British colonies that the queen has sought to uphold throughout her reign. As Amy McKeever reports for [National Geographic](#), the association took shape in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when wars and decolonization movements [weakened](#) the once-dominant British Empire. Fifteen realms in the Commonwealth, including Canada and Jamaica, still recognize Elizabeth as their head of state, report Yuliya Talmazan and Shira Pinson for [NBC News](#).

European colonization of Barbados dates to the 16th century. According to [Encyclopedia Britannica](#), the region's first settlers may have migrated from South America as early as 1600 B.C.E. Indigenous Arawak and Carib people inhabited the island between roughly 500 and 1500 C.E. English colonizers laid claim to Barbados in [1625](#), rapidly establishing farms staffed by enslaved African people. By the end of the so-called [sugar revolution](#) in the early 19th century, European enslavers had deported some [2.3 million](#) enslaved Africans to sugar plantations in Barbados and other Caribbean colonies, generating huge profits for English investors.

Historian [Hilary M. Beckles](#) of the University of the West Indies has argued that chattel slavery on Barbadian soil set the standard for similarly brutal enslavement on other Caribbean islands. In the [preface](#) to his 2016 book [The First Black Slave Society](#), Beckles wrote that English enslavers' decisions to invest in plantation slavery on Barbados "accelerated the pace of mass enslavement of Africans as the basis of Europe's colonial projects in the Atlantic world." For two centuries, British forces enslaved nearly half a million African people on Barbadian sugar plantations, reported Jon Hurdle for the [New York Times](#) in 2017. Britain [abolished slavery](#) in 1834, prompted in part by massive anti-slavery uprisings such as the 1816 [Bussa's rebellion](#), writes historian Padraic X. Scanlan for the [Washington Post](#).

Some of the chief investors in the transport of enslaved African people to the Caribbean were [members](#) of the British royal family. During Tuesday's ceremony, Prince Charles, heir to the English throne, acknowledged Barbados' history of enslavement but did not apologize for the monarchy's role in sustaining it.

"From the darkest days of our past, and the appalling atrocity of slavery, which forever stains our history, the people of this island forged their path with extraordinary fortitude," [said](#) Charles, who attended the event as a guest of honor in his 95-year-old mother's stead.

A generation of political leaders inspired by the global [Black power](#) and [anti-colonialist](#) movements of the 1960s and '70s helped negotiate Barbados' independence in the 20th century. In his first speech in front of the United Nations, Barbados' inaugural prime minister, [Errol Barrow](#), [declared](#) that the newly formed nation would be "friends of all, satellites to none." He [urged his country](#) not to "loiter on colonial premises."

Neighboring Caribbean islands became republics shortly after gaining their independence. (Guyana cast off royal rule in 1970, and Trinidad and Tobago followed suit in 1976.) But Barbados' road to republicanism proved far longer.

As Mark Landler and Azam Ahmed wrote for the [New York Times](#) last September, the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests reignited debates about Barbados' relationship with colonial rule, spurring Mottley and other leaders to break with Elizabeth. Some historians suggest that Barbados' historic decision will prompt the queen's remaining 15 realms to follow suit.

"It is a monumental step," [Kristina Hinds](#), a political scientist at the University of the West Indies, tells NBC News. "I think it is part of the evolution of our independence, and it is certainly long overdue."